

Clark J, Woolner P, Thomas U. [*Exploring Well-being in Schools: The positive Psychology Programme*](#). Newcastle University: Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, 2009.

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Newcastle University Research



Exploring Well-being in Schools: The positive Psychology Programme

**Final Report
November 2009**

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1. The Research Team

The research team – Jill Clark, Pam Woolner and Ulrike Thomas – are based in the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT) at Newcastle University. CfLaT has considerable collective expertise in evaluation, research and project management on a local, national and international basis, with over £2,000,000 worth of awards secured this academic year.

The aspiration of the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT) is to be an authority in the research and practice of learning and teaching, lifelong and lifewide. We are widely recognised as an effective University partner in developing research-led practice with a growing reputation for pragmatic collaboration and improvement in the field of learning and teaching. The Centre has a strong orientation towards applied research and impact, developed through a range of work exploring a variety of innovations all of which address the educational experience and outcomes of learners.

CfLaT aims to inform the thinking and action of learners, practitioners and policy makers in a range of areas; the key themes being:

- professional practice;
- learning environments;
- innovative pedagogies;
- learning to learn;
- curriculum innovation; and
- learning beyond the classroom.

Collaborative partnerships based on a reflective research cycle (which mirrors an effective teaching and learning cycle), between the Centre and educational practitioners and stakeholders, lead to the co-creation and transformation of knowledge. In pursuit of this our flagship projects include:

- Knowledge Transfer Partnership Programme;
- Learning To Learn (Phase 3 and 4 Evaluations as well as Learning to Learn in Further Education which starts in September 2008);
- DCSF funded Extended Schools Subsidy Pathway Evaluation;
- Improving Coaching (funded by CfBT)
- Open Future (funded by the Helen Hamlyn Trust).

Jill Clark, Pam Woolner and Ulrike Thomas from the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT) at Newcastle University were commissioned by The Learning Challenge Foundation in the autumn of 2008 to conduct a year-long evaluation of the Positive Psychology Programme.

2. The Positive Psychology Programme

The Positive Psychology (PP) programme runs across two schools, School A (a Community College) and School B (a High School) in the North East of England, and is designed to help learners access a curriculum that is better balanced between the content of what they have to learn and the skills that they will display in order to be successful. In addition the aim of the programme is to make it clear that caring and supportive relationships between students and between students and staff are the foundation for success in school and outside.

The approach maintained is one of optimistic and positive teaching, drawing on the insights of the positive psychology movement that believes that there is as much to be learnt from the study of healthy people as there is from sick people. By translating this approach into school, the tutor takes the skills and relationships that successful learners display and teaches them rather than waiting for problems to occur.

Successful learners display a set of skills that are not specific to any one subject, they include being able to persevere on a task, to manage distractions and to imagine solutions. These skills have been given a structure by several academics and in the PP programme, uses the Personal Thinking and Learning Skills as they appear on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) website. There are six categories of skill:

- Independent Enquirers
- Creative Thinkers
- Reflective Learners
- Team Workers
- Self-Managers and
- Effective Participators.

This programme teaches 10 specific Thoughtful Learner skills to promote these headings.

The programme is delivered by Form Tutors working alongside a specialist. Each child in will have a person whom they know will be able to respond to any concerns and needs they experience in their first school year, and a regular opportunity for them to talk these concerns through. By providing Form Tutors with meaningful time with their form, the aim is to achieve this. The double staffing of these sessions means that the class can be divided to make the class discussions more personal. There are sessions spent in half-class groups focusing on the development and management of positive relationships, these are called Action Groupskills or AGI.

Every learner in Year 7 (School B) and Year 9 (School A) will receive an hour a week during which time they will be involved in a programme of skills development and relationship building. During the Autumn Term 2008, the children will develop

skills under the three themes of Independent Enquirers, Self Managers and Creative Thinkers from the QCA Personal Thinking and Learning Themes. Coverage of the themes will continue in the Spring Term 2009 and the Summer Term will be spent in recap and development of the themes. Within each theme are specific Thoughtful Learner Skills that are the positive behaviours and attributes that we are seeking to teach. These sessions will take place with half of one from group and be taught by the From Tutor. While this is going on, another teacher will be working with the other half of the group, either providing support for the teaching of the skill, or more usually, delivering the Action GroupSkills. The detail is produced in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The Personal, Thinking and Learning Themes, the Thoughtful Learner Skills and their Explanation

Personal, Thinking & Learning Themes	Thoughtful Learner Skills	Explanation
Independent Enquirers	Perseverance	Being able to manage the feelings of anxiety arising from new learning
	Reasoning	Being able to develop logical thinking
Creative Thinkers	Questioning	Being aware of levels of questions, using the right level
	Imagining	Able to generate possibilities out of unlikely combinations
Reflective Learners	Reasoning 2	Able to justify the conclusions using language and logic
	Recognising and Producing Quality	Able to reproduce the characteristics of quality
Team Workers	Independence and Collaboration	Able to work alone and in a group, marshalling resources to complete a task
Self Managers	Locking onto Learning	Able to manage distractions and stay on-task
	Meta-Learning	Able to identify one's learning preferences and adapt to every learning situation
Effective Participators	Empathy	Able to step inside the shoes of another, and act with compassion
	Distilling	Able to have a sense of progress as a person and learner. Bring the fruits of experience to new situations

3. Research Aims and Objectives

3.1 The Research Questions

Rather than restrict the research brief and narrow it down to specific research questions, we identified the following themes to explore through the research:

- *Understandings and perceptions of the Positive Psychology Programme*: how did pupils and staff describe it? What did they understand about the aims and objectives of the programme? And what does the programme mean to them?
- *Experiences of the Programme*: how did these differ among pupils and staff, and across the two schools? What worked well, or worked less well? How did it fit with the remainder of the curriculum? Were there particular organizational issues within and across each school?
- *Possible impact of the programme*: Did it have any kind of impact on the ethos of the schools? How did it impact on the relationships between staff and pupils? And on learning behaviours of pupils? Were there implications for the well-being of pupils?

3.2 The Research Approach

With these areas of investigation in mind, the methodology we employed was one that aimed to be least invasive and which allowed us to document the processes used and perceptions of all parties, at points throughout the research. Whilst any evaluation has limitations relating to sample representation, incomplete datasets and research design, through this evaluation, we were keen to explore the *processes* of delivery and practice within the schools, and provide useful feedback. We did not set out to provide a summative evaluation which focused purely on numerical and quantitative data; but we adopted Cronbach's (1982) view of formative evaluation that, as soon as an intervention is implemented it evolves in relation to the local context.

A case study methodology is ideal when an in-depth exploratory investigation is being undertaken. Unlike an experimental study where data collection and analysis methods can hide some details, case studies are designed to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants by using multiple sources of data. Case studies are also multi-perspectival analyses (Tellis, 1997), which means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the participants, but also of the relevant groups of participants and the interaction between them. The case study methodology is, therefore, a highly appropriate approach to our exploration of this programme. To explore our research theme, the case study methodology included the following data collection tools and methodologies which were used within the two schools:

- a. Diamond Ranking and Network Diagram activities (twice)
- b. Online questionnaire survey (ELS) of pupils
- c. Focus group discussions with pupil groups
- d. PMI activities with pupils
- e. Interviews with key school staff
- f. Impact of Positive Psychology Questionnaires with pupils.

Following discussions with the funder, we adopted a creative – and very visual - approach to collecting data from staff and pupils in each school. We agreed upon a method of collection which placed value on the views of pupils in particular. The participation of learners, and associated phrases such as *student voice* are driving many initiatives and policies (Clark 2004), as well as the process of school development and evaluation (Flutter and Ruddock, 2004). This movement for the student voice to be heard and recognized (for example, MacBeath et al., 2003; McIntyre et al., 2005) is underpinned by a wider philosophical and cultural shift towards listening to the views of children initiated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Importantly, the Convention asks for the inclusion of children and young people in decision-making on structures and initiatives that concern them (Article 12).

3.3 The Research Design and Methodology

The team of three researchers visited each school on three occasions for a period of 1-3 days (November 2008, May 2009 and July 2009) in order to work with staff and students. The staff represented a variety of subject areas and ranged in seniority from newly qualified to Head Teacher, and included support staff such as Special Educational Needs learning support staff, teaching assistants, administrative staff and lunchtime supervisors.

Three different methods were employed to facilitate discussion and collect data. In each case, however, a mediating activity, or 'something to do', was provided, which participants worked on either individually, in pairs or as groups of three. This was based on the success of mediated interviews and of photo elicitation in 'bridging gaps between the worlds of the researcher and the researched' (Harper 2002, p.20), providing a focus for all parties so that 'awkward silences can be covered' (Banks 2001, p.68). Furthermore, it was decided that visual, rather than purely verbal, prompts and activities would be used. This was partly in response to the nature of an enquiry into schools as places and communities where learning and social relationships develop. It also recognises the success noted by Clark (2005) of such approaches in overcoming differences between participants in literacy skills, confidence and articulacy.

During the November 2008 and July 2009 visits the research team used tools during the interviews that were intended to tap a wider understanding of visual, non-verbal meaning, so one of our activities was a photograph-based diamond

ranking activity (more visual) and one was a network diagram activity (more spatial). The same two activities were repeated on each occasion in order to provide comparative data for analysis. During the May 2009 visits we adopted a more traditional focus group format in order to develop our understanding of the experiences and attitudes of the school staff and students. However, in keeping with our creative, visual approach, the focus group interviews were mediated by a visual speech bubble activity adapted from the work of Hartnell–Young and Fisher (2007).

Diamond Ranking and Network Diagram activities

The Diamond ranking activity is a recognised thinking skills tool, usually carried out with written statements (Rockett and Percival 2002, p.99). Here the activity involved a subset of nine of the photographs, reproduced on two sheets of A4 paper in colour. These photographs were specific to each school and showed various locations around the school that represented different situations and/or scenarios. Participants, working in pairs or threesomes, cut out these pictures and stuck them onto a piece of A3 paper in a diamond shape, ranking them by position so that the preferred picture is at the top and the most disliked one at the bottom (see figure 1 below). They were encouraged to annotate their diamond with comments and explanations.

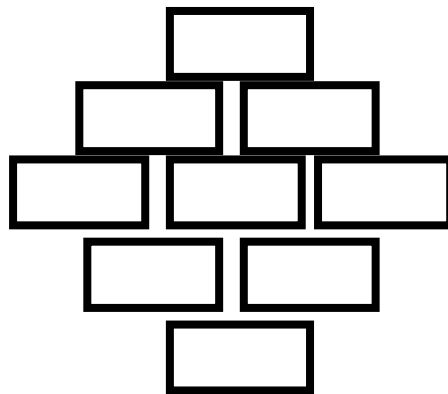


Figure 1: Organisation of *diamond ranking*

Participants were asked to look and consider the photographs, to think about their school and what the images meant to them.



The ideas that we encouraged participants to think about whilst making their judgements were:

“Good things happening in your school”

“Rubbish things happening in your school”



Table 1: Diamond Ranking Activity sample sizes across the schools

	Diamond Ranking Activity First Visit	Diamond Ranking Activity Second Visit	Sample Size Totals
School A			
Students	55	16	71
Staff	28	10	38
Subtotal	83	26	109
School B			
Students	59	30	89
Staff	16	12	28
Subtotal	75	42	117
Total Sample Size	158	68	226

In the **Network Diagram activity** we instructed participants to work alone, and gave each person a blank sheet of A3 paper and a collection of post-it notes and coloured pens. Firstly, the participants wrote their own name on a post-it and stuck this in the middle. We then asked them to make a diagram showing “**people who support you to learn**”. Where necessary, the research team prompted for: members of your family? Friends? People at school?, etc. We asked participants to write the names in conjunction with their roles, e.g. Mr. Smith (maths teacher) on separate post-it notes, and then to arrange them on their A3 sheet.



Again, the research team was on hand to prompt or suggest ideas for the positioning of the post-it notes, for example: those placed nearest to your name help you more often? Or they could group people according to who they are (e.g. family, school friends, PE Department, etc). Once the participants said they were happy with their diagrams, we asked them to stick them down permanently and then write notes, comments and arrows to annotate their diagrams.



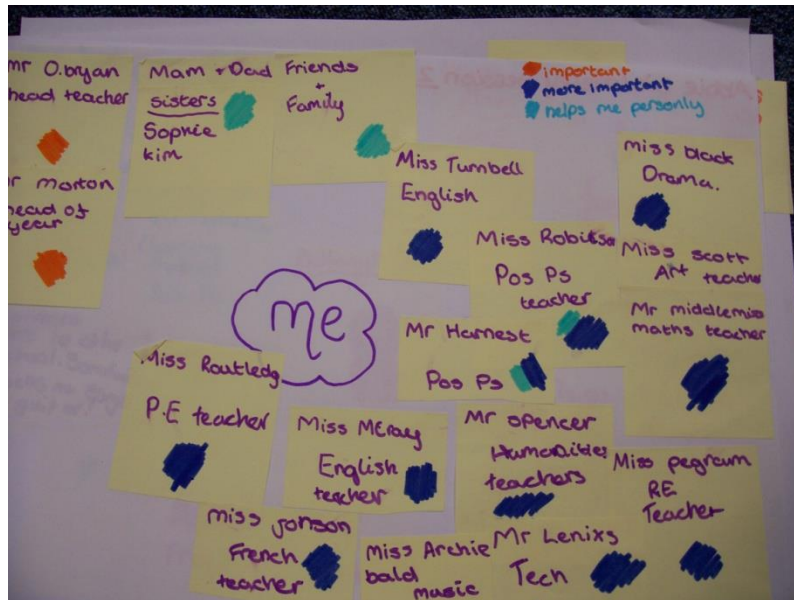
Table 2: Network Diagram Activity sample size across the schools

School A	Network Diagram Activity First visit	Network Diagram Activity Second visit	Sample Size Totals
Students	15	14	29
Staff	5	0	5
Subtotal	20	14	34
School B			
Students	56	31	87
Staff	9	0	9
Subtotal	65	31	96
Total Sample Size	85	45	130

More staff than students completed the network diagram activity. There were similar numbers of boys and girls but more female than male staff, but this will reflect larger number of female staff across the two schools. Across the two

schools, there were a larger proportion of females at School B, but this gender balance across the two schools is not significantly different.

Examples of what the network diagrams looked like when completed can be seen below:



Each completed network was coded and entered into a database. Items which were coded included whether close family members were mentioned, wider family members, friends, school teachers, and outside organisation or agency members. **The Environment for Learning Survey (ELS): online questionnaire**

This survey was completed by students at both schools and is provided online by Antidote (<http://www.antidote-progress.org/index.php>). Surveys were completed near the beginning of the year by students in both schools (Y7 students at School B; Y9 students at School A) and then again at the end of the academic year. The survey provides quantitative results in the form of mean scores on five dimensions (capable, listened to, accepted, safe and included) for various aspects of school life (e.g. relationships, atmosphere, teaching and learning). It provides qualitative results in the form of student comments about school, relationships and future hopes. The table below shows the numbers of students in the two schools who completed the surveys:

	School A	School B	Total
Before PP	182	105	287
After PP	131	100	231
Total Sample Size	313	205	518

As can be seen, there was some reduction in respondents on the second occasion, but this was not excessive.

Interviews and PMI activity

The research team completed the ***Interviews and PMI activity*** during the intervening visits to both schools in order to explore perceptions and experiences of the Positive Psychology programme. By this time the participants should have had quite extensive experience of the Positive Psychology programme. The staff were interviewed in a one-to-one in-depth interview, whilst students were interviewed in two focus group discussions in each school. Schedules were used for each, and included questions such as *'What can you tell us about the Positive Psychology programme?* which enabled us to explore a general understanding of the programme, and more focussed questions such as *'Thinking about the sessions you've had so far – do any of them stand out for you as being particularly helpful? And why?'*. Staff interviewed included those who were involved in the actual delivery of the programme, and senior management with a strategic overview. Two focus groups were conducted with two different groups in each school, and our interview sample sizes can be seen in Table 3 below:

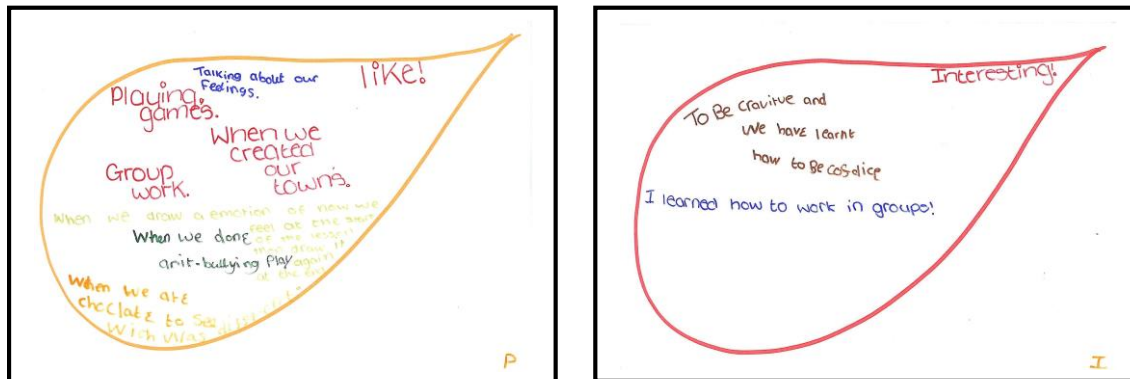
Table 3: Interview sample sizes across schools

Interviews	School A	School B	Totals
Students	16	17	33
Staff	3	4	7
Total Sample Size	19	21	40

To help facilitate and stimulate discussion during the focus groups with the students, we provided them with three sheets of paper with speech bubbles on them. Working in groups of three they used the bubbles to discuss and then record their thoughts and ideas based on the following questions:

1. Tell us something you like about Positive Psychology and why? (**Plus**)
2. Tell us something you don't like about Positive Psychology and why? (**Minus**)
3. Tell us something you have learnt in Positive Psychology (**Interesting**)

The **PMI activity** – Plus, Minus and Interesting – is a method for stimulating lateral and creative thinking and is a useful way of recognising the value of an idea, rather than being influenced by the emotions that surround it.



Staff were interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview schedule, and were recorded for the purposes of note-taking.

Impact of Positive Psychology Questionnaires

The central intention of the impact questionnaires (completed in May), was to look for evidence of the impact of Positive Psychology on students' understanding of their own learning. We were also interested, however, in whether they had generally found the programme interesting and enjoyable. The main questionnaire items were based on descriptions of the ten Thoughtful Learner Skills, which the PP programme is designed to promote and develop (see the introduction section). For each item, students were asked to indicate on a five point scale the extent to which they agreed PP had helped them develop the skill or way of approaching schoolwork (see questionnaire, Appendix 1). Finally, learners were asked to show on two other five point scales how interesting and enjoyable they found the sessions overall.

To provide a comparison with the PP programme, each student also completed the same questionnaire in relation to their PSHE or Lifeskills lessons. The questionnaires were completed by all the students in two classes in each school, in early May when they would have experienced the programme and the PSHE sessions for two complete school terms. The table below shows the numbers of students in the two schools who completed the survey:

	School A	School B	Total
Students class 1	19	16	
Students class 2	22	18	
Total Sample Size	41	34	75

4. The curriculum and ethos of the schools

4.1 The Positive Psychology (PP) programme is designed to help learners access a curriculum that is better balanced between the content of what they have to learn and the skills that they will display in order to be successful. In addition the aim of the programme is to make it clear that caring and supportive relationships between students and between students and staff are the foundation for success in school and outside.

It has been found in previous research with small groups that such a programme can affect the attitudes and behaviours of individual students. Central questions for this year group wide programme were whether the involvement of whole year groups would result in changes to their experience of the school, and whether any changes could be linked to impacts on wider school ethos. The approach maintained is one of optimistic and positive teaching, drawing on the insights of the positive psychology movement that believes that there is as much to be learnt from the study of healthy people as there is from sick people. By translating this approach into school, the tutor takes the skills and relationships that successful learners display and teaches them rather than waiting for problems to occur.

Successful learners display a set of skills that are not specific to any one subject, they include being able to persevere on a task, to manage distractions and to imagine solutions. These skills have been given a structure by several academics and in the PP programme, uses the Personal Thinking and Learning Skills as they appear on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) website. There are six categories of skill:

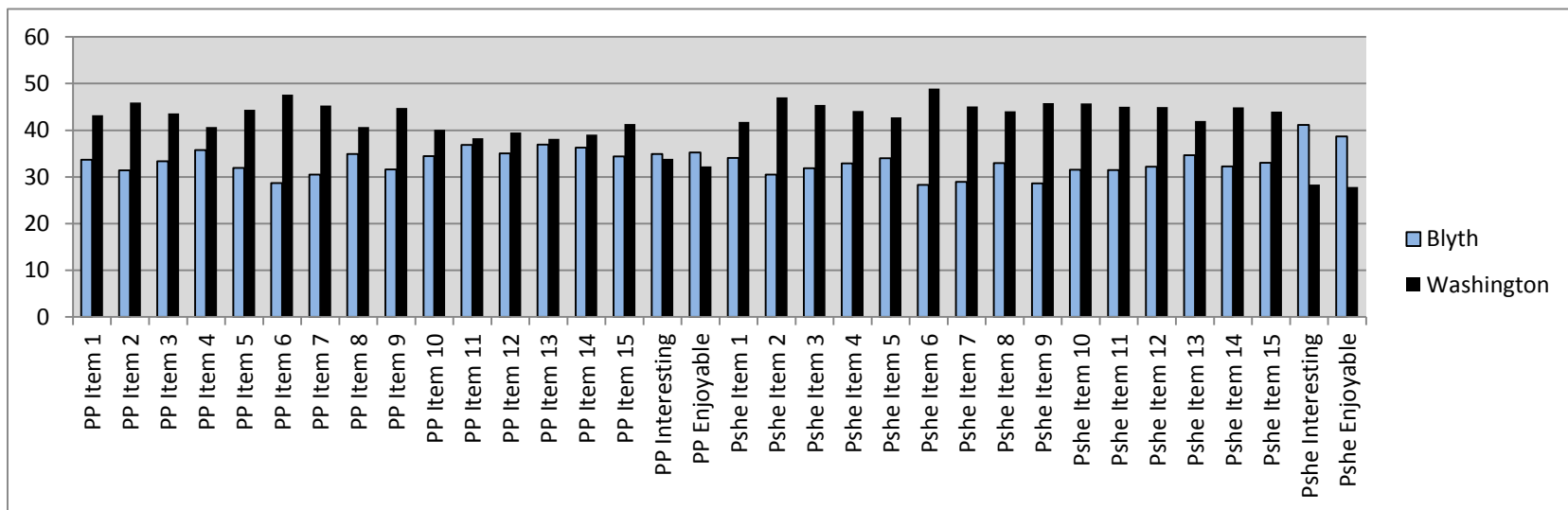
- Independent Enquirers
- Creative Thinkers
- Reflective Learners
- Team Workers
- Self-Managers and
- Effective Participators.

Experience of PP in the two schools

Impact questionnaires were completed by two classes from each school and since one side of the questionnaire asked about PP and the other side about PSHE (School A) or Lifeskills (School B), we have data on both these subjects from these students. It is possible to compare responses between the schools and, looking across the schools, to consider the students' reactions to PP compared to PSHE.

The following bar chart (overleaf) shows the mean rank given to each item, allowing a comparison of responses from the two schools. From this chart it is apparent that there are differences between the students from the two schools in how they perceive the lessons in PP and in PSHE, but these differences are more pronounced for PSHE. A Mann Whitney U test reveals statistically significant differences between schools in the responses given to virtually every numbered

item relating to PSHE, but only to some of the numbered items relating to PP. There are also quite marked differences in responses to the questions of whether the two subjects are found overall to be interesting and enjoyable: the responses to these two questions for PP do not differ significantly (Mann Whitney U tests: PP interesting: NSchool A=39, NSchool B=29, $p=0.823$; PP enjoyable: NSchool A=39, NSchool B=28, $p=0.514$), but the differences for PSHE are statistically significant, with School A students tending to be more positive (Mann Whitney U tests: PSHE interesting: NSchool A=39, NSchool B=31, $p=0.007$; PSHE enjoyable: NSchool A=38, NSchool B=29, $p=0.02$). Taken as a whole, this finding of some differences in response to PP in the two schools, but much more consistent difference for PSHE, suggests that the initiative was delivered fairly similarly across the two schools.



Mean rank for each questionnaire item for students from the two schools

Within our data, the ELS survey provided quantitative results in the form of mean scores on five dimensions (capable, listened to, accepted, safe and included) for various aspects of school life (e.g. relationships, atmosphere, teaching and learning). In addition, it provided qualitative results in the form of student comments about school, relationships and future hopes (School B only). It was intended that the survey would provide quantitative measurements of student perceptions of the more intangible aspects of school life which might be affected by any change in ethos. The first survey carried out early in the academic year, provided a snapshot of initial student perceptions in the two schools, with the second survey allowing for comparisons over the year to be made.

Initial responses in the two schools were similar. In both schools, students were broadly positive. For most of the aspects of school, at least three quarters of students reported *sometimes* or *almost always* feeling capable, listened to, accepted, safe and included. Their average response on the 6-point scales used tended to be 4, or slightly lower, comfortably on the positive side of the scale. In School B, there was generally very little change in the responses over the two occasions of surveying although there were many comments about the physical appearance of the building, with high hopes of the new building the following year. The comments below made by School B students (1=first ELS survey, 2=second ELS survey) give a flavor of the range of opinion and ideas expressed on both occasions:

"I love my school and I feel very safe in my school and I enjoy coming to school."(2)

"Just that they [views] get looked at well and so that they understand our views so we can feel better just by knowing that we do have a say."(1)

"people don't respect the school and they spoil it for others, we want it to look nice and to be proud of it" (2)

4.2 School B: Organisational issues:

Staff and students in School B reported several organisational issues which they felt had affected the potential impact, and even success, of the Positive Psychology programme. Training was provided for those staff who were to take on teaching the PP programme, and those staff that received this said it was very helpful in understanding the ethos and aims of the objectives of the programme. However, one Y7 form teacher reported that although he had been given the training, when the timetable came out for the year, restrictions meant that he was not even teaching PP despite having the training.

as a y7 tutor in the past, we always had one lesson with our form to bond. But this year I have been teaching Lifeskills with another form, so that bonding process hasn't taken place or is happening slower, because you only see them for 10-15 minutes a day. Getting to know the pupils, seeing how they behave, to understand what the other teachers were complaining about. Timetabling has been the biggest problem this year.

Related difficulties to timetabling also meant that some teachers taught PP, but not to their own form class (as they were led to believe), a fact that staff were very disappointed about as they felt the PP programme was a very useful way to 'bond' with their form and build on relationships with them at the crucial time of their first year in the school.

I assumed it was going to be with my form, I feel like I know the form who I teach PP and Lifeskills to an awful lot better than I know my own form, a huge amount better. My PP class will come to me with social problems and problems with them, and I've actually had their form teachers refer them to me

In addition, other organisational issue which clearly had an impact on delivery of the PP were staff absences. Whilst it is impossible to predict this kind of thing in any school, the fact that PP was double staffed meant that adequate, regular, cover was difficult. One particular group of students had a series of supply teachers for PP – who were untrained in PP – and who were not au fait with the aims and the ethos of the programme. Their responses in the interviews, PMI activities and EEL comments were consequently very negative:

"For a long time we just had substitute teachers"

"Substitutes all the time doing SAME THING!"

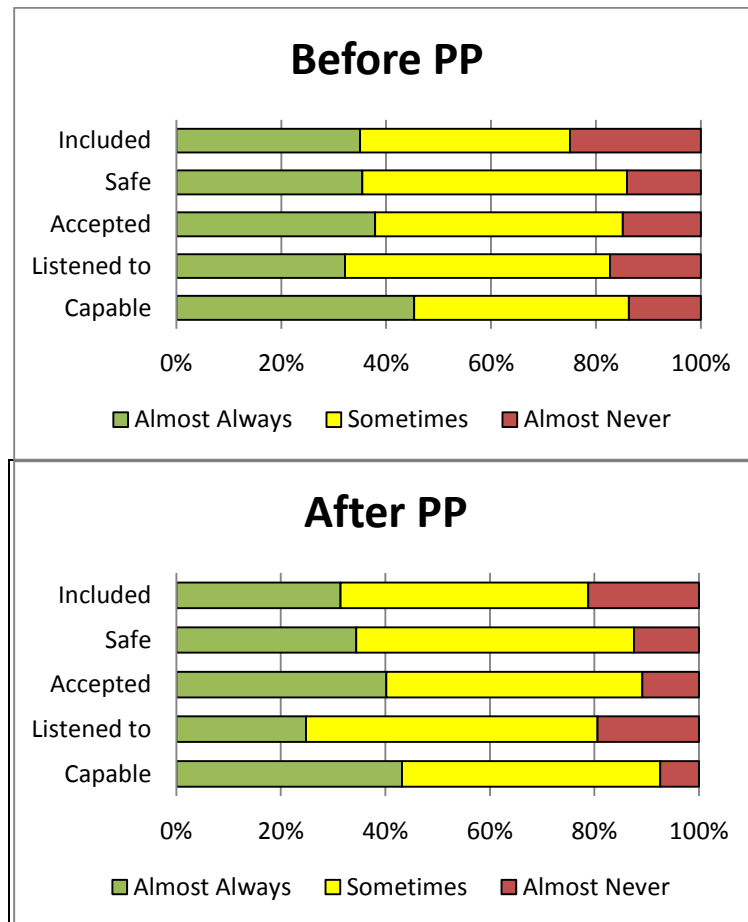
"Always getting spare teachers, who don't know what we're doing"

"We've never had a proper lesson"

(School B students PMI)

Interestingly, the ELS results suggest limited improvement in student perceptions of organisation in school over the year (see charts below). This is in contrast to relatively little change found in students' opinions about most other aspects of

school life at School B and even some reduction in positive perceptions relating to teaching and learning.



School B student perceptions of organisational factors before and after PP

This change could perhaps reflect a sense of priority and urgency given to organisational issues within the management of the school, which paradoxically resulted in a high level of awareness when arrangements did not work out as planned. Notably there was also more to go wrong since the school had made the attempt to link PP to existing relationship-building with form tutors. Although the idea was not wholly successful in practice, the intention demonstrates a concern with organising the integration of PP.

School A: Organisational issues

In School A, a comparison of ELS responses made on the two occasions suggests rather more change in student perceptions, none of it in a positive direction. Most

aspects of school life were perceived somewhat more negatively on the second occasion. This may be related to the difference in ages of the students at the two schools (Year 7 in School B, Year 9 in School A). Measures of self concept and self efficacy tend to decline with age (Marsh, 2006) and such declines might be linked to declining perceptions of school.

Responses to organisational issues of school, which were improved in School B, were typical of the general decline in perceptions at School A. However, there were clear organisational differences across the schools which are worth highlighting. Whereas in School B the organisation of PP was quite centralised, in School A the management of PP appeared to be left more to the discretion of individual teachers. For example, a feature described as successful by both students and staff was that some of the small groups consisted of boys separate from the girls and vice versa. This was not a general method of enacting PP in School A but an arrangement which was fitted to a particular class of student by the teachers involved.

Individual staff in School A also reported finding it difficult sometimes to use the PP resources and materials, a concern which was not emphasised by the School B staff. Sometimes the problem was identified as not having enough time to prepare. In addition, one teacher described how she 'adapted' the resources in her own way whilst sticking to the aims and objectives of each session:

I've got one group who really like to talk a lot, and they like to share experiences and they really like drama as well, so I've done quite a bit of that because I'm part drama trained. Sometimes I find the lesson plans that TQ gives us are not very user friendly for the teachers here. I've tended to pick out the key themes that are in the plan and adapt it for my groups. I hate teaching other people's things anyway, it's very, very difficult.

This again suggests a more independent and individualised approach to the organisation and teaching of PP by the School A teachers, which is perhaps suggestive of the management ethos of the school in comparison to School B.

4.3 Impact

School B: Teaching and Learning

Student comments from the ELS survey undertaken in School B (1=first survey, 2=second survey) were reasonably positive, with many of these comments relating to teaching and learning. Examples included:

“I really like this school it is the best one I have been to. Most of the teachers plan and do fun lessons, but some of them are a little bit boring and the teachers go through the lessons too fast.” (1)

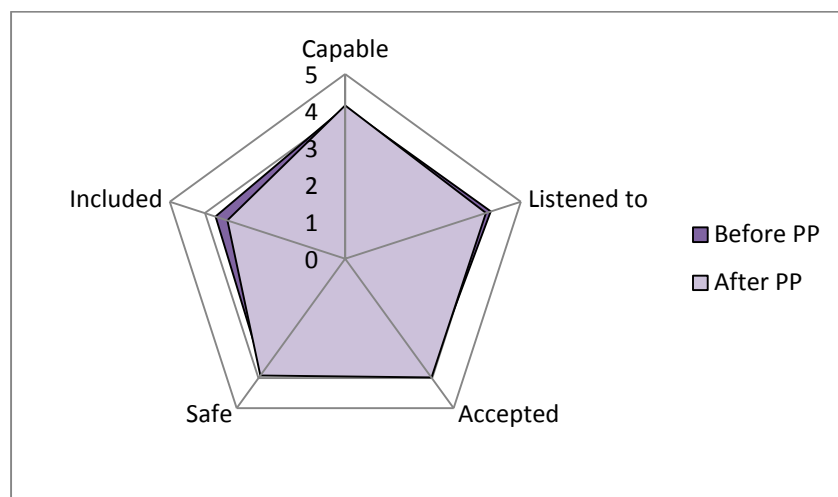
“I like to say that I have enjoyed year seven and I hope year eight is as good as this year my teachers my friends and mostly most of the people in this school have made this year fun happy and have helped me work better thankyou xx” (2)

Amongst the staff interviewed, there was a general feeling that the school had gone through (and was going through) some dramatic changes which had impacted on the quality of teaching and learning in the school. A recent closure of a school in the catchment area and the re-housing of families had clearly changed the intake of the school:

What became immediately obvious was that these children didn't seem to have the ability to learn – they didn't have the skills to listen, they misunderstood things very easily and just didn't have the communication skills that we were used to, so it's been causing a lot of conflict with staff who were used to the traditional ways of teaching. (staff member)

The Positive Psychology Programme was, therefore, perceived to be a way to help achieve two things: – raise awareness of new teaching and learning methods with staff and to improve the ability of children to engage in their learning.

However, the ELS quantitative responses suggest some reduction in positive perceptions by students relating to teaching and learning. Although, as the chart below shows, this is not a dramatic decline, it is notable in being the only aspect of school life where School B student responses became distinctly more negative over the year.



School B student perceptions of teaching and learning before and after PP

This suggests that although those involved with PP were quite clear about how the programme could positively influence both teaching and learning, there were limits to actual impact. The reason for this might be that the PP initiative only involved some teaching staff. Those staff involved with PP were aware that to those teachers not involved in it, the PP programme would be considered quite “*airy fairy*” and that elements of the programme would be difficult to ‘pull through’ to other subjects. One teacher involved with PP described how she endeavored to make links to the wider curriculum in PP sessions, and, furthermore, was able to relate issues in her own subject lessons back to ideas from PP:

The way I see it and the kids see it with PP is that everything we do there we relate to other lessons, across the school, every week, no matter what the subject is, if it's reasoning, questioning or persevering, always bring it back to 'can you think of a time when this has happened?' It's to help them with the skills to deal with these problems in their everyday lessons. [...] When we are talking and when a pupil might get stuck on a problem within English – they know the words now, like perseverance, they know that they can ask me, or break the problem down, or go back and look at it in a different way, so yes, I've seen it working. The difficulty is not everyone is aware of what it is or how it works and other Y7 teachers may not be able to make those links.

As this teacher points out, those not involved in PP did not know enough about it to make those links to their own subjects. Also, perhaps not all of those delivering PP were so aware of what the possible widespread impact of the programme could be. As with any initiative, this can obviously impact on the ‘embeddedness’ of something no matter how creative and innovative it may be.

School A: Teaching and Learning

The PP programme was delivered to Year 9s in School A, which although is the first year of that school because of the middle school set arrangement, this does mean that it was delivered to pupils who were two years older. Almost all of the staff we spoke to (both involved in PP and those not) said that they felt this was a little ‘too late’:

Something like PP can help to understand what they need to do and how they need to it to achieve something, this should be happening in the first year [of middle school], or even earlier – perhaps aged 6 or 7 rather than later.

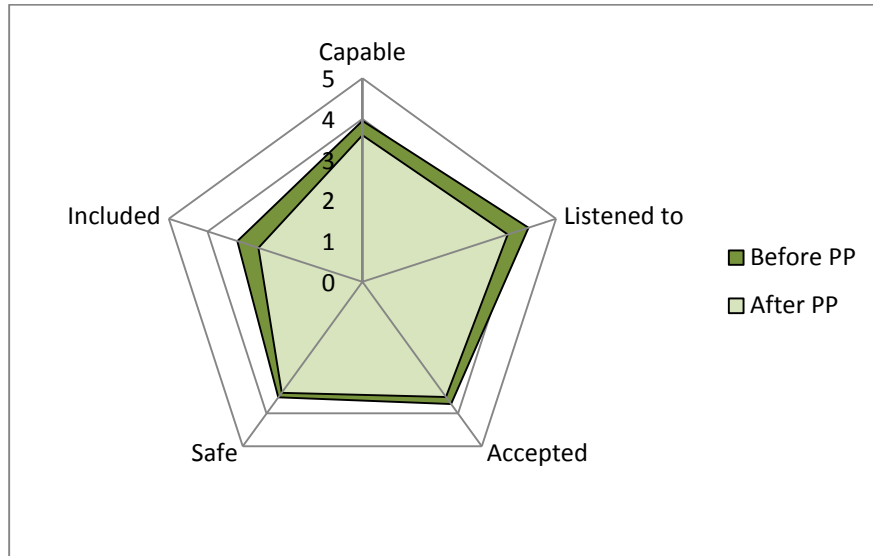
Within School A there was also doubt expressed about the possible impact of a programme such as PP could have if it was not assessed or reported on. One staff member told us:

when you have a course that’s not assessed or reported on, how seriously do the students take it? And by that token, their parents? And other staff?

However, in stark contrast to this view, one group of students reported that it was this very aspect of PP that set it apart from other subjects and made it a much more enjoyable, relaxed, safe environment where they were able to build a trusting relationship with each other and the tutor where they could talk about their feelings and talk through strategies to overcome various issues such as stress. This particular group also valued the fact that they were not always aware of the lesson objectives as they were in other subjects:

We might have learning objective but we don’t know what it is – nobody tells us – just feels sometimes like I’m in a massive project, and trapped, but in a good way.

The ELS survey showed more of a decline in positive perceptions of teaching and learning than was found in School B (see chart below). As discussed previously, this could relate to more negative opinions due to the greater age of the School A students. However, the finding also supports the impression voiced by both staff and students above of PP standing apart from other teaching and learning, and so not impacting significantly on experiences across the curriculum.



School A student perceptions of teaching and learning before and after PP

5. Relationships

5.1 The aim of the programme is to make it clear that caring and supportive relationships between students and between students and staff are the foundation for success in school and outside. Every learner in Year 7 and Year 9 received an hour a week during which time they were involved in a programme of skills development and relationship building.

Responses to the ELS survey relating to relationships gives some idea of the pattern of student perceptions at the beginning of the year before the PP initiative. As can be seen from the chart below, in both schools, students were particularly positive about the relationships they enjoy with their friends, but less positive about relationships with their peers and with adults. This pattern is somewhat more pronounced for the older School A students.

5.2

In both schools, the intention was that the programme would be delivered by the form tutors of the classes involved in order to develop the relationship of the teachers with their form groups. The initial training took place with these tutors. However, in some cases, as highlighted in section 4, for organisational reasons which included timetabling problems and staff illness, the programme was not delivered by the form tutors and this was felt by many to have a detrimental effect, because it did not allow the form tutors to really get to know their students.

“Only three groups are taught by their form tutors, which is a real shame. That was a big thing that got in the way of the success. Five groups haven’t got their form tutors. In the three groups working with their form tutors, it’s working really well.” (School B Senior Management - interview)

“...and a lot of the things that the kids talk about in the sessions, their anxieties, are the things their form tutors need to know.” (School B Teacher -interview)

Interestingly some teachers made organisational changes based on their experiences over the first few weeks of delivering the programme. In School A, initially one class of students was split into two and then taught alternately by two teachers (one focused on the ‘action skills’ and the other on the ‘thoughtful learner skills’). After a while they decided to keep their groups and ‘switch the style of the lessons’. It was felt that with the continuity of staff:

“It’s much easier to build up a relationship with [the students] (School A teacher – interview)

As was the case with the teachers, the students in both schools also felt that the organisational issues impacted on the relationships. In School B this was keenly felt by those students who were taught mainly by supply teachers:

“Not have loads of different teachers, have Mr Q all the way through, not having half the class coming and going, when you talk to my friends they’ve been having something different, and we’ve lost out, we’ve had all those teachers” (School B student – focus group)

“Substitutes all the time doing the SAME THING” (School B student – PMI)

“Don’t like people disturbing the lesson” (School A student – PMI)

In School A where one group of teachers had made the decision to split the groups they taught by gender, this appeared to be appreciated by the students involved:

“Boys are separate. Boys can talk about boyish things without the girls.” (School A student – interview)

5.3 Impact

The Teacher-student relationship

Interviews with the staff at both School B and School A demonstrate that the staff who delivered the programme felt that positive relationships did develop, even with groups of students that had quite challenging behaviour.

“At first they were virtually unteachable, but now they are much calmer and much nicer.” (School A Teacher)

“I feel like I know the form who I teach Positive Psychology and Lifeskills with, an awful lot better than I know my own form, a huge amount better. My positive psychology class will come to me with social problems and I have actually had their form teachers refer them to me in the past.” (School B teacher)

Many of the students also valued what is essentially a very different type of teacher-student relationship in the positive psychology lessons. Where the lessons worked well, the atmosphere was described as ‘relaxed’ and ‘calm’ and it was one where everyone’s views were respected.

“I can talk to a lot of people and tell them my feelings and when I do talk to them they understand me and help me with my problems but I feel safer talking to my friends or my form tutor. School B Year 7 student

“We trust him [the PP teacher] – you can talk to him he will keep it secret if you ask him to. Some teachers are gobby”.(School A Year 9 student)

There were also examples of students who felt they got to know their teachers better, seeing them as ‘people’:

“One of the teachers told us about how he was worried when his daughter came home late from the park. He was really worried, so he told us about that and it was good to hear him say that, so we talked about how it would be if we did something like that. Other teachers should do that in other lessons, we might understand them better if we know how they feel, if they are having a bad day or something.” (School B student – interview)

However, it is important to note that not all students may want to develop this type of teacher- student relationship and this needs to be acknowledged and addressed by teachers involved in the programme’s delivery:

“It just winds you up when they try to be your friend.” (School A student – interview)

This may be particularly pertinent with older students.

Student-student relationships

Evidence from the focus group interviews demonstrates that many of the activities undertaken in the lessons fostered positive peer relationships. The programme encourages students to listen to one another and respect different opinions.

“We have learnt how to respect others no matter of their differences” (School A student)

“You need to listen to everyone while they are talking (School B student)

“We have learnt to work together and respect each other” (School A student)

Students also have to learn to work together as a team and this was a feature of the lessons that many students highlighted during the interviews although some comments reveal that this way of working is also not without its stresses for the students:

“Sharing our feelings and working as a team. It’s got easier over time. Everyone was shy at the start, didn’t know what it was about either.”

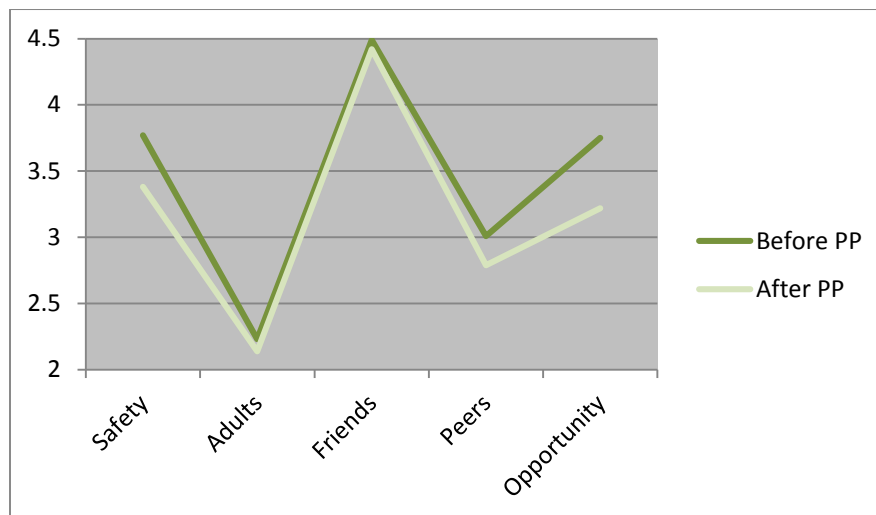
Some of the teachers also noticed improvements in the way the students treated one another:

“Did a life-line activity – where we shared low-points, one girl was in tears because she was upset thinking about a death in her family – and the whole group rallied around after her and supported her. (School A teacher)

Change in relationships over the year

ELS survey

At both schools, the ELS responses to relationship items remained fairly unchanged over time. As can be seen from the chart below, this was even the case in School A where, as mentioned previously, student perceptions of school life tended to decline over the year.



School A student perceptions of relationships before and after PP

The comments made by School B students on the two occasions of the survey support this idea of little change in overall quality of relationships. As the quotes below demonstrate, there were positive and more negative experiences noted by students on both occasions:

It is a good school, but we need more time in break and in dinner also so that we can have a better communications with each other and be a lot more happier. (School B/1)

I can talk to a lot of people and tell them my feelings and when i do talk to them they understand me and help me with my problems but i feel safer talking to my friends or my form tutor. (School B/1)

I feel safe in school but there is people who I can't act myself around (School B/1)

I don't feel like I can tell my feelings to them i am not that close to them yet but some I can (School B/1)

Some staff (teachers) can understand us and make us feel special. We can talk to them like our friend. (School B/1)

I have a good relationship with some teachers, but others I don't. I have good friends but some students don't care about you. (School B/2)

I have very good friendships with lots of people in the school. (School B/2)

My lessons are crowded with pupils and it's hard to show my feelings. Most of the pupils in my class can't get along so then the lesson isn't much fun. The staff are ok but could be better. (School B/2)

Network Diagrams

The network diagrams were designed to provide a visual representation of the relationships of the students with the people who support them in their learning. It was intended that this would provide insights into the structures of their relationships which would complement the measure of overall perceived quality of relationships provided by the ELS survey data.

Considering changes in the network diagrams constructed at the beginning and end of the year, there were two categories where, for students in both schools, there were statistically significant differences over the two occasions. Across all the students at both schools, there was a greater tendency to include friends 'out of school' and 'other' school staff in the networks on the second occasion. Although friendships within school might have been expected to deepen over the time between the visits (November to July), this seems more surprising for friends outside school. Together with the tendency to include more 'other' people from within school, this perhaps suggests a general widening of relationship networks during this time.

Supporting this interpretation, it is also possible to identify a tendency to include more categories of person on the second occasion, although there were exceptions to this. Visual inspection of the networks suggested that the second ones were more complete so this was tested by summing the number of categories represented within each network. As the tables below demonstrate, this total number of categories increased on average over the PP period in both schools, though it is more pronounced in School A.

School A

stage		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	sig. (t-test: two-tailed)
total	autumn 2008	54	5.81	1.934	0.021
	summer 2009	14	7.21	2.155	

School B

stage		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	sig. (t-test: two-tailed)
total	autumn 2008	56	5.89	1.614	0.083
	summer 2009	31	6.55	1.767	

All students

stage		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	sig. (t-test: two-tailed)
total	autumn 2008	110	5.85	1.770	0.005
	summer 2009	45	6.76	1.897	

Taken together, these findings from very different tools of inquiry suggest that the students' relationships may have developed over the year. There is not evidence of a general increase in positive perceptions of relationships, so much as a suggestions of a widening of awareness of networks of support and help.

6. Learning Behaviours

6.1 Aims:

As outlined in Section 2, one of the fundamental aims of the Positive Psychology programme is to teach the skills required for successful learning. In the programme these are referred to as 'Thoughtful Learner skills' and are based on the categories provided by the QCA's Personal thinking and Learning Skills (PLTS)

6.2 Organisational issues

The schools chose to implement the positive psychology lessons in a variety of ways, and as is the case with any new teaching innovation being implemented, a variety of organisational issues arose. These have been discussed in detail in sections 4.2 and 5.2 and will not be re-examined here, although a suggestion of the impact of these variations on students' understanding of PP may be inferred by the differing patterns of response to the impact questionnaire found between classes and between the two schools (see section 6.3). The focus in 6.2 will be upon the organisational factors identified in the data which led to the development of successful learning behaviours, and which need to be examined in the context of the implementation of any programme.

i) Staffing

The Positive Psychology programme needs to be double staffed in order to create an environment in which the teachers and students can build positive relationships. Although the ability of the two schools to double staff varied over the year, where it was achieved, the outcomes were more successful. With double staffing the groups that are taught are smaller and the impact of this was commented on by the teaching staff:

"You couldn't do it with just one teacher, with 30 students, it has to be a small group, and it has been beneficial within the group" (School A teacher – interview)

"It's certainly had a big impact on those 'magnolia children' who fade into the background, don't have an opportunity to say anything; chose not to say anything and are happy to just be there- kind of 'grey' – not naughty, not good, not anything. But because it's small groups, because everybody takes it in turns, they have an opportunity to speak, get involved and be part of something – that's been its' most powerful impact." (School B Senior Management – interview)

"It's lovely having a small group for Positive Psychology – not practical for every lesson, but very good for Positive Psychology (School B teacher – interview)

ii) Grouping of students

The Positive Psychology programme was always taught to students in their form groups and this was valued by the students themselves:

Positive PMI statement – “being with our form” (School B student)

Positive PMI statement – “sometimes like being with my form” (School A student)

The form groups were then split into two smaller groups and although in most cases this was random, in School A, one class was split on a gender basis. Comments during the focus group interviews with the boys revealed that many liked this and felt they were able to talk more freely than if girls were present. However, one student did point out that:

“Smaller groups is probably the easiest, if you split the boys and girls then it’s too separate” (School A student – interview)

iii) Teaching Materials

Comments from the teachers show that although they followed the general themes of the teaching materials, many adapted them to suit their own needs. These adaptations were made for a variety of reasons, including:

- the make-up of the groups:

“the group that’s been doing the drama are mostly boys, and not very nice boys, but they’ve really settled as a group and are really starting to come together nicely. The other group are very chatty, and we could easily spend the whole lesson talking about what makes us angry, or what nice holidays we’ve had, and they like to do that and share experiences. The chatty group hate the drama. (School A teacher – interview)

- the lesson plans:

“Sometimes I find the lesson plans ...are not very user friendly for the teachers here. I’ve tended to pick out the key themes that are in the plan and adapt it for my groups. I hate teaching other people’s things anyway, it’s very, very difficult”. (School A teacher – interview)

- age appropriateness of the lesson activities:

“I think it would be better geared towards a younger age group –some of the games were babyish and that has alienated some of the students. At that age – 13-14 everything is rubbish.” (School A teacher – interview)

iv) Integration of Positive Psychology onto other subjects

The potential for the Positive Psychology to impact upon the students learning and behaviour in other subjects and school in general appears to be most successful when the teachers involved, teach the students in other subjects:

“As a subject teacher of two groups of Year 7s – I’ve seen a crossover from positive psychology into our lessons. But I know I’ll use it because I’ve delivered it, so I’m able in lessons to say ‘stop a moment, and remind ourselves like what makes a good audience?’ So the work of the PP is useful to me because I’ve delivered it.” (School B teacher – interview)

The value of the programme would therefore appear to be its potential for integration across subject boundaries, rather than a pure focus in one off lessons:

“The way I see it and the kids see it with PP is that everything we do there we relate to other lessons, across the school, every week, no matter what the subject is, if it’s reasoning, questioning nor persevering, always bring it back to ‘can you think of a time when this has happened?’ It’s to help them with the skills to deal with these problems in their everyday lessons..... I’ve tried hard to make that link because the last thing I want is for this to be just a once a week thing, isn’t it nice when we don’t have to do written work?”

6.3 Impact

The results across all of the data reveal that despite the organisational difficulties experienced in both schools, the teachers and students felt that learning behaviour developed in a positive way.

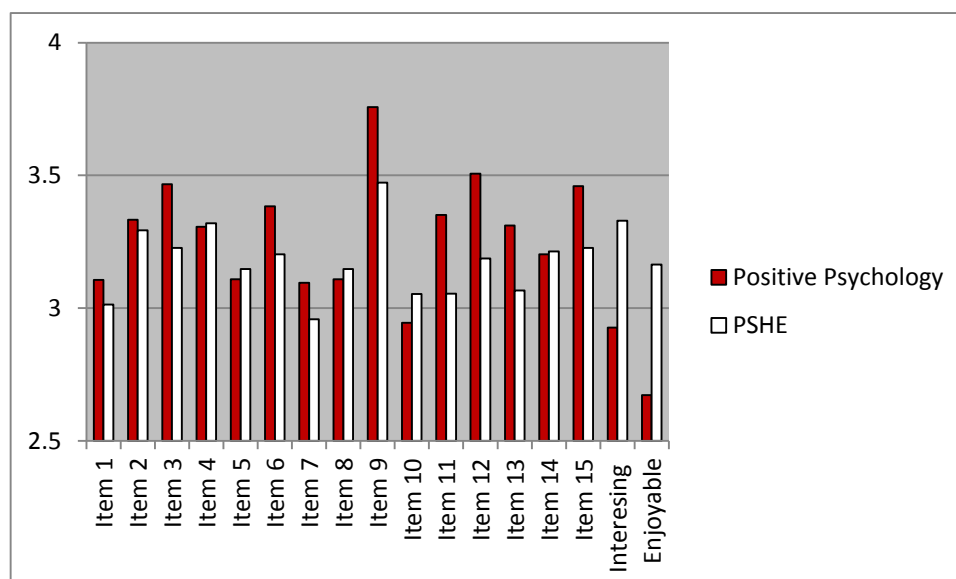
The impact questionnaires show that whilst some of them did not enjoy their Positive Psychology lessons – and this was often due to the organisational issues outlined earlier – they did understand what skills they were meant to be learning in the positive psychology lessons, and they also felt that they had learnt them.

The questionnaires were completed by two classes from each school with one side of the questionnaire asking about PP and the other side about PSHE (School A) or Lifeskills (School B). The main questionnaire items were based on descriptions of the ten Thoughtful Learner Skills, which the PP programme is designed to promote and develop. For each item, students were asked to indicate on a five point scale the extent to which they agreed PP (or PSHE) had helped them develop the skill or way of approaching schoolwork. It is possible to compare responses between the schools and, looking across the schools, to consider the students’ reactions to PP compared to PSHE.

Comparison of response to PP and PSHE

Comparison across all students

Although there were differences between the schools in how PSHE is experienced (see section 4.1), it is still possible to make a meaningful comparison between student responses to PP and to PSHE, since each student was being asked about their own PSHE. The following bar chart shows the mean response to each item (on the 1-5 scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' which was used on the questionnaire):



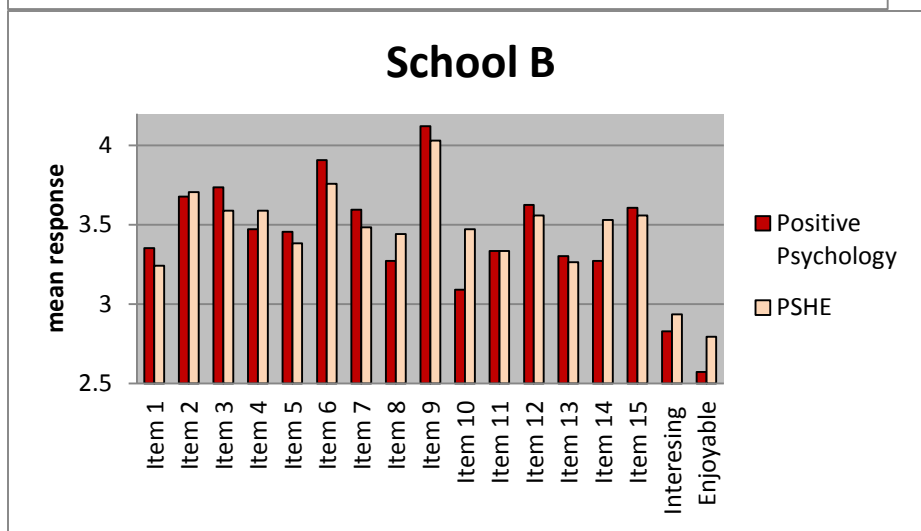
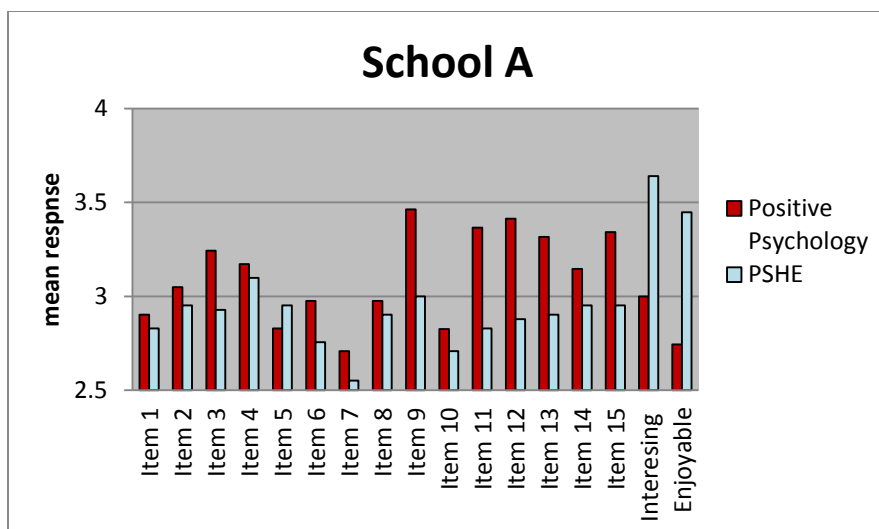
Mean response for each questionnaire item comparing PP to PSHE for all students

As can be seen, for most of the numbered statements, students are somewhat more positive in their agreement that this skill is being developed by PP compared to PSHE. The differences in response which reach statistical significance, shown in the table overleaf, are all in the direction of more positive agreement with the statements for PP compared to PSHE:

Item	Statement	N	Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test p
Item 3	Help me to keep trying	75	0.031
Item 11	Have helped me to understand how I learn best	73	0.023
Item 12	Have made me more aware of other people's feelings and preferences	73	0.002
Item 13	Encourage me to feel that I am progressing in my learning	74	0.031

Interestingly, though, as can be seen from the chart, the students report that PSHE sessions are more interesting and more enjoyable than PP sessions, and these differences are also statistically significant (Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test: Interesting, N= 68 $p=0.006$; Enjoyable, N=65, $p=0.005$).

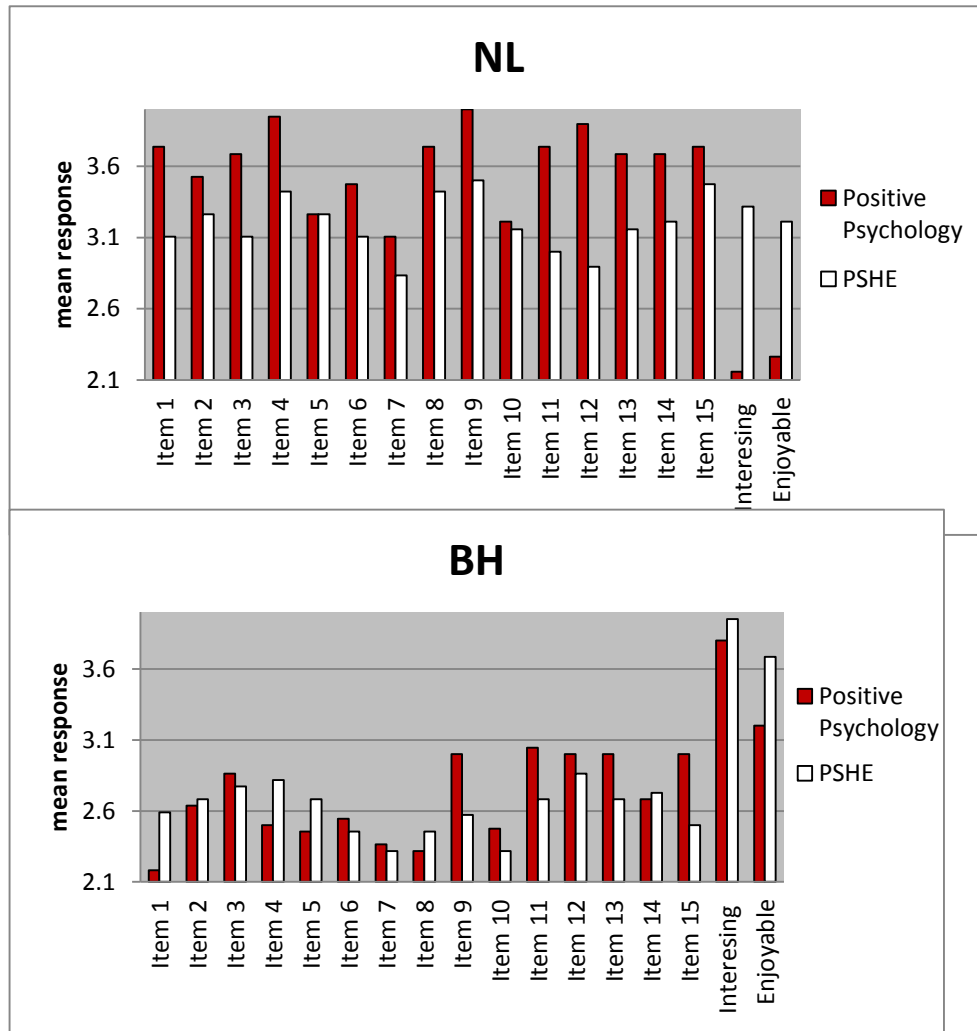
Patterns of response in the two schools

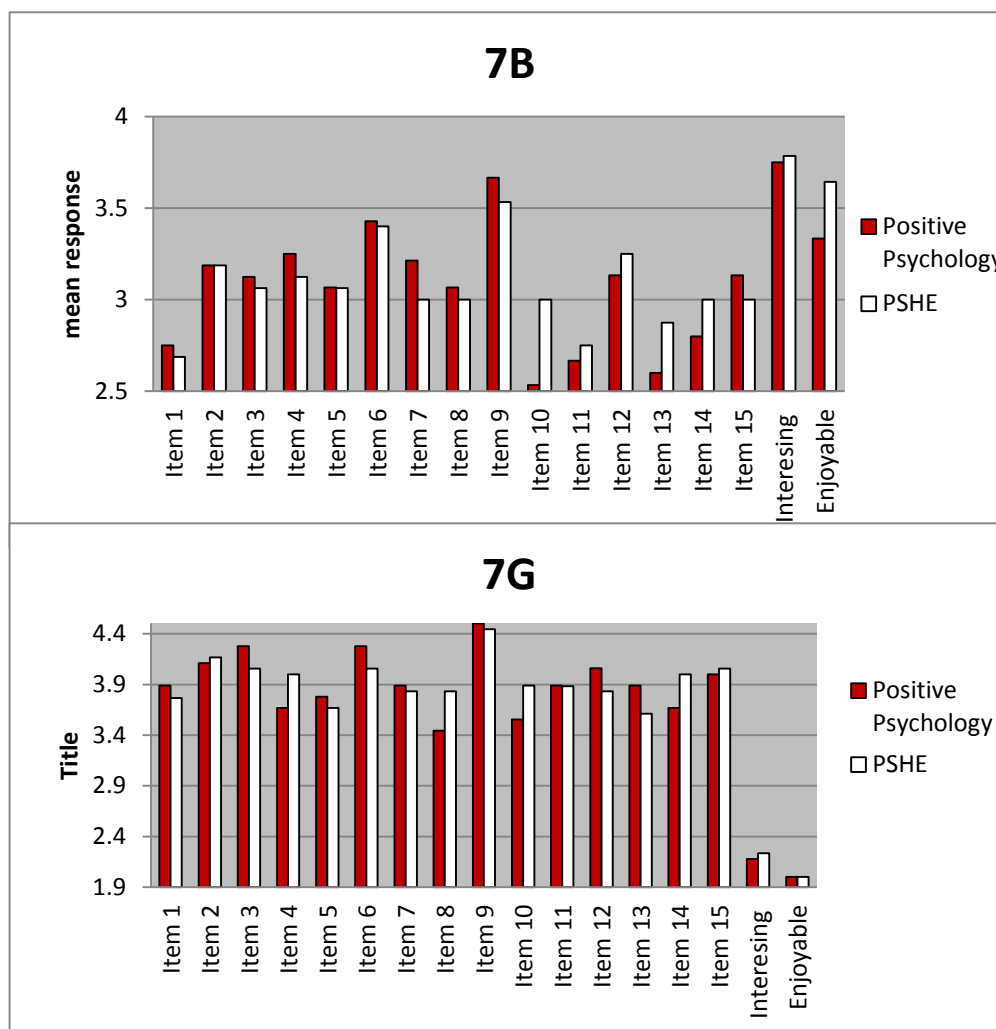


The pattern of agreeing more with the statements in relation to PP than PSHE is much more complete and pronounced for the School A responses. For virtually all of the numbered statements, School A students are somewhat more positive in their agreement that this skill is being developed by PP compared to PSHE. The differences in response which reach statistical significance, to items 11, 12 and 13, are all in the direction of more positive agreement with the statements for PP compared to PSHE. In contrast, none of the responses by the School B students relating to PP are statistically significantly different from their responses relating to PSHE.

Patterns of response in each class

As can be seen, the patterns of responses are quite different across the four classes.





While acknowledging these differing patterns of response across the four classes surveyed, there is a suggestion that for at least some of the students across the two schools, PP was experienced as having an impact on the learning behaviours that were targeted by the programme. Even if the students did not always find the lessons interesting or enjoyable, there was a tendency for them to agree that certain learning behaviours and attitudes were being developed positively by PP.

The language that was used by the students during the interviews and that was written on the PMI speech bubbles and the diamond ranking activity further suggest that the students themselves are aware that they have developed the thoughtful learner skills and they are able to clearly articulate this.

The following table shows how comments made during the PMI and focus groups may be categorised according to the Thoughtful Learner Skills which PP aims to develop, and which formed the basis for the impact questionnaire items

Thoughtful Learner Skills	Explanation	Examples
Perseverance	Being able to manage the feelings of anxiety arising from new learning	<i>"keep calm"</i> (PMI) <i>"Keep stress under control"</i> (PMI)
Reasoning	Being able to develop logical thinking	<i>"The way the brain works – logic-emotion"</i> (focus group)
Questioning	Being aware of levels of questions, using the right level	<i>"..sometimes we design the questions too. It helps us in lessons if we don't understand something. I never used to put my hand up but sometimes I do that now"</i> (Focus group)
Imagining	Able to generate possibilities out of unlikely combinations	<i>"be creative and we have learnt how to be confident"</i> (PMI)
Reasoning 2	Able to justify the conclusions using language and logic	<i>"One of the teachers told us about how he was worried when his daughter came home late from the park. He was really worried, so he told us about that and it was good to hear him say that, so we talked about how it would be if we did something like that. Other teachers should do that in other lessons, we might understand them better if we know how they feel, if they are having a bad day or something."</i> (focus group)
Recognising and Producing Quality	Able to reproduce the characteristics of quality	<i>"Anti bullying play – we worked good as a group, it made me feel proud"</i> (Focus group) <i>"This is a good environment for learning"</i> (diamond ranking activity)
Independence and Collaboration	Able to work alone and in a group, marshalling resources to complete a task	<i>"I learned how to work in groups"</i> (PMI) <i>"When you work on your own you can get a lot more done, because you can sometimes get arguments about stuff"</i> (focus group)

Locking onto Learning	Able to manage distractions and stay on-task	<i>"It tries to help you focus on the lessons that you've got and your attitude towards them"</i> (focus group)
Meta-Learning	Able to identify one's learning preferences and adapt to every learning situation	<i>This is good because they are learning in different ways"</i> (diamond ranking activity) <i>You can say how you feel and how we like to work -not told how to work</i> (focus group)
Empathy	Able to step inside the shoes of another, and act with compassion	<i>"Taking the time to listen to other people's experiences"</i> (PMI) <i>"We have learnt to work together and respect each other"</i> (PMI)
Distilling	Able to have a sense of progress as a person and learner. Bring the fruits of experience to new situations	<i>"I struggle sometimes sometimes on my own, but as a group you can discuss things"</i> (focus group)

Diamond ranking of photographs completed by students at the beginning and end of the school year also suggest some broader changes in their general understanding of learning.

The diamond ranking activities and the discussions around them indicated on the initial visit that learning - and the classrooms where this learning takes place – was thought of highly in School B by both pupils and staff. When asked to rank specific visual representations of school situations (see Photograph 1 below), 60% of the pupils and 75% of the staff ranked it in the high to top positions in their diamonds..



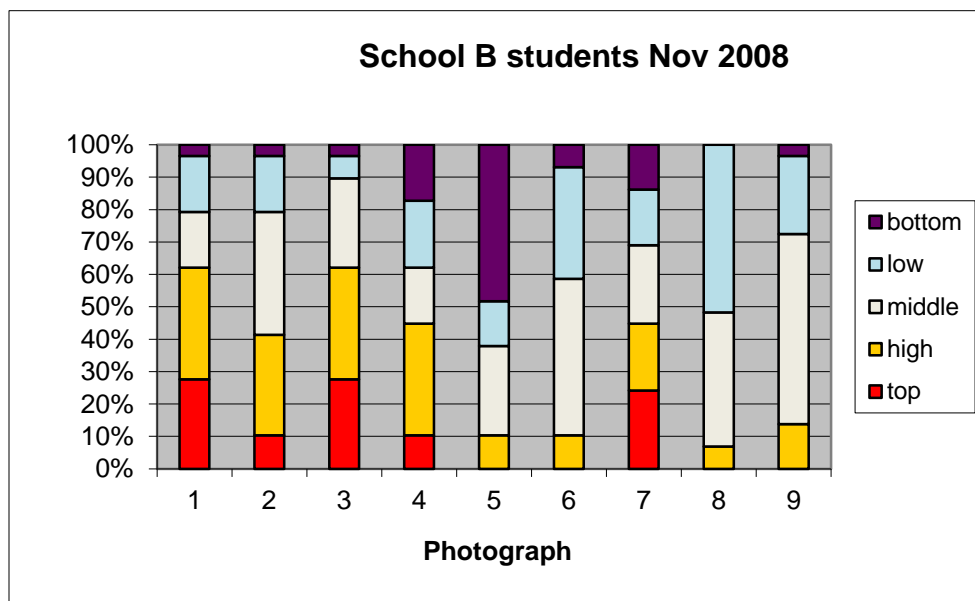
Photograph 1: School B

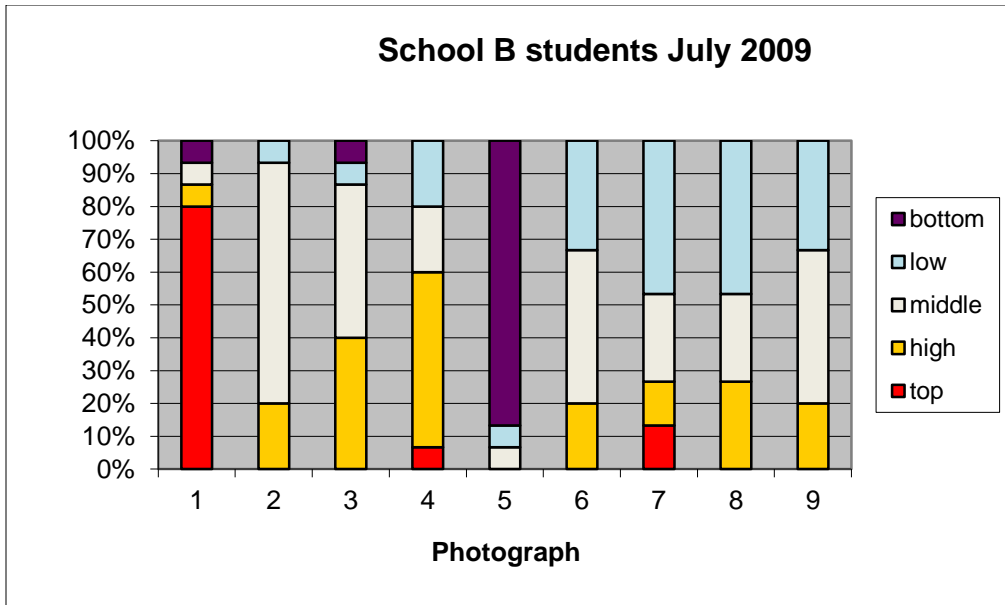
Positive comments from the pupils reflect that learning, concentration and paying attention are considered to be an important and valued factor of their school experience, and quotes included:

*'Everyone is listening and working hard';
'This represents learning';
'Need to learn some stuff'
'this is a happy lesson';
'learning something new' and
'learning something different'.*

The staff were also generally very positive in their comments: *'Good teaching'; 'Active visual learning'; 'Kids working well'; 'Colourful environment'; 'pupils engaged' and 'pupils interested'.*

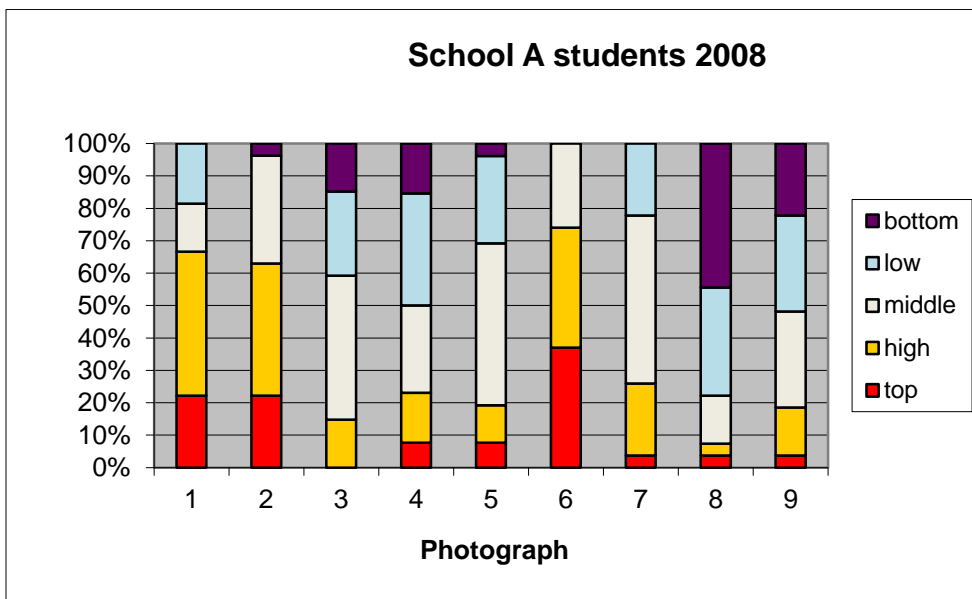
On the second occasion, the diamonds produced by the students had changed in that there was more agreement between their diamonds, with many more including this photograph as the top picture. This change in the proportions of the placings of the photographs is shown by the two bar charts below.

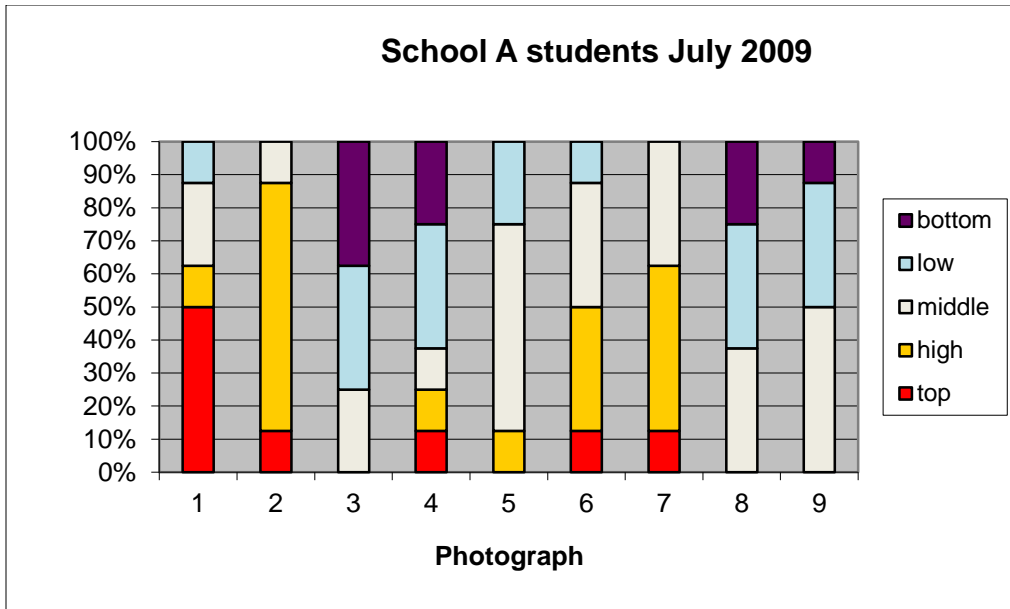




As is evident, students were more certain by the end of the school year that this photograph showed 'good things happening in school'. This change in perception was not found in the diamonds produced by the School B staff, so suggests changes at the level of student ideas and attitudes to learning rather than due to changes in educational approach in school.

The diamond rankings carried out in School A over the two occasions are not so straightforward to interpret. As can be seen from the following bar charts of proportions of response to each photograph, there is not the same coalescing of opinion about learning in school.





However, the photograph of independent learning in the school library (photo 1, see below) was more consistently ranked on the second occasion (almost always top or high and never bottom in July).



The photo of the science lesson in School A (see photograph 5 below) received fairly similar rankings on the two occasions, from both the staff and the pupils.



Photograph 5: School A

Comments by both staff and students demonstrated how each of the photos were interpreted in a variety of ways. For example, some staff comments noted the stance of the teacher rather than the lesson itself and interpreted the action as *disruption and conflict*. This was a theme which some pupils also addressed with comments including '*students getting told off*'.

The positive comments from the staff included:

*Nice engaging lesson, discipline
Students in class and learning
Good interactive lesson!*

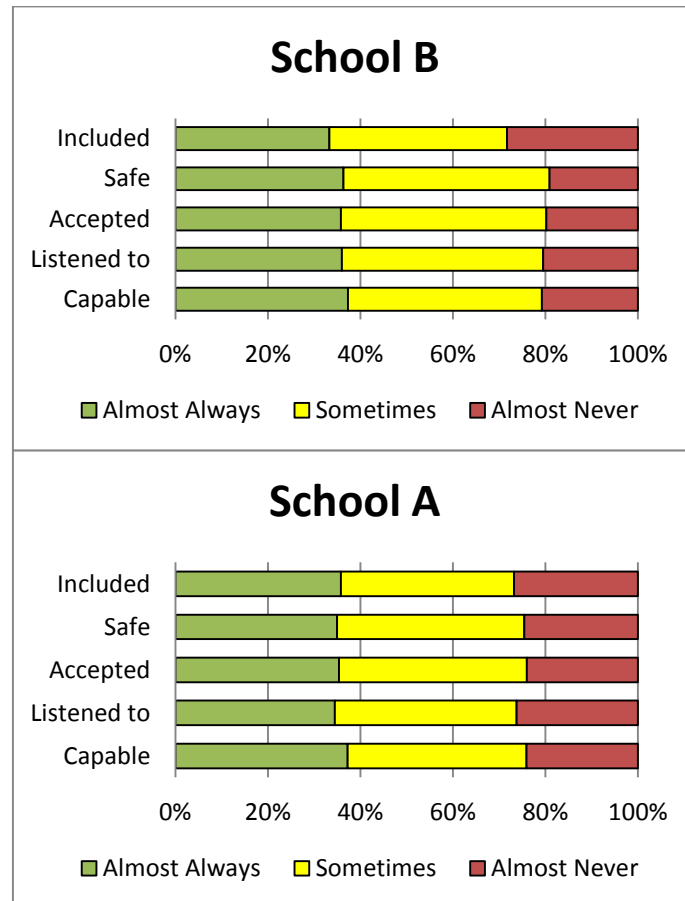
Generally, the comments from the pupils present a, perhaps not unexpected, spectrum of views about lessons. When the photo appeared in the top position it was annotated with *doing experiments are really fun*.

In the middle position comments included:

*Fun lessons
People working
Lessons- have a laugh*

7. Implications for mental health and well-being

The ELS survey data revealed that initially, in both schools, students were broadly positive. For most of the aspects of school, at least three quarters of students reported *sometimes* or *almost always* feeling capable, listened to, accepted, safe and included. Their average response on the 6-point scales used tended to be 4, or slightly lower, comfortably on the positive side of the scale. For example, the charts below show the responses to items relating to emotional experience.

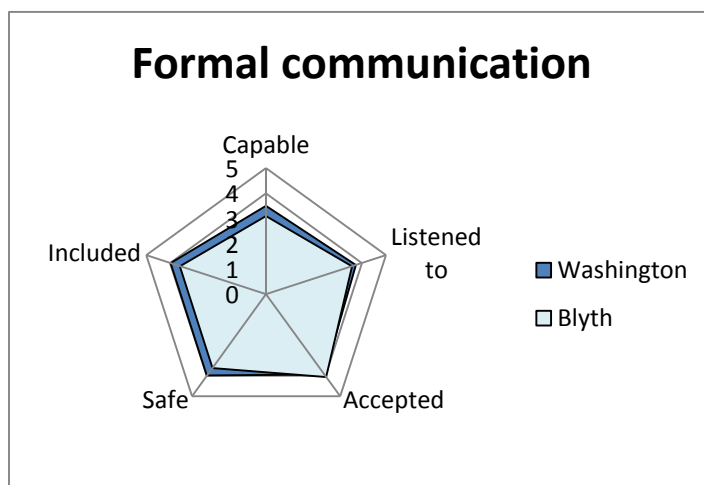
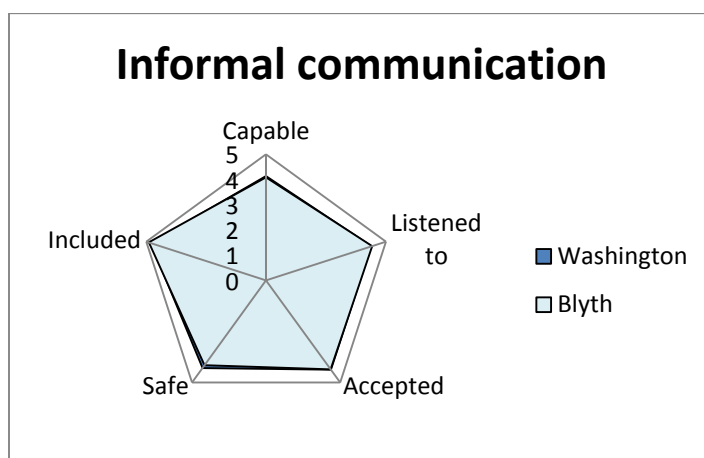


Student perceptions of their emotional experience before PP in the two schools

Despite these positive majorities, however, in both schools there is a significant minority whose perceptions are considerably more negative. The proportion of such students in School A is slightly higher, but this may relate to the difference in age of the students involved in PP at the two schools and a tendency for older children to feel less positive (as discussed previously).

Another aspect of school life addressed by ELS which seems relevant to the consideration of wellbeing is communication. As the following two charts show, in

both schools, student perceptions of informal communication were very positive. Yet their perceptions of formal communication within school were less positive, with School A students responding more negatively than School B students.



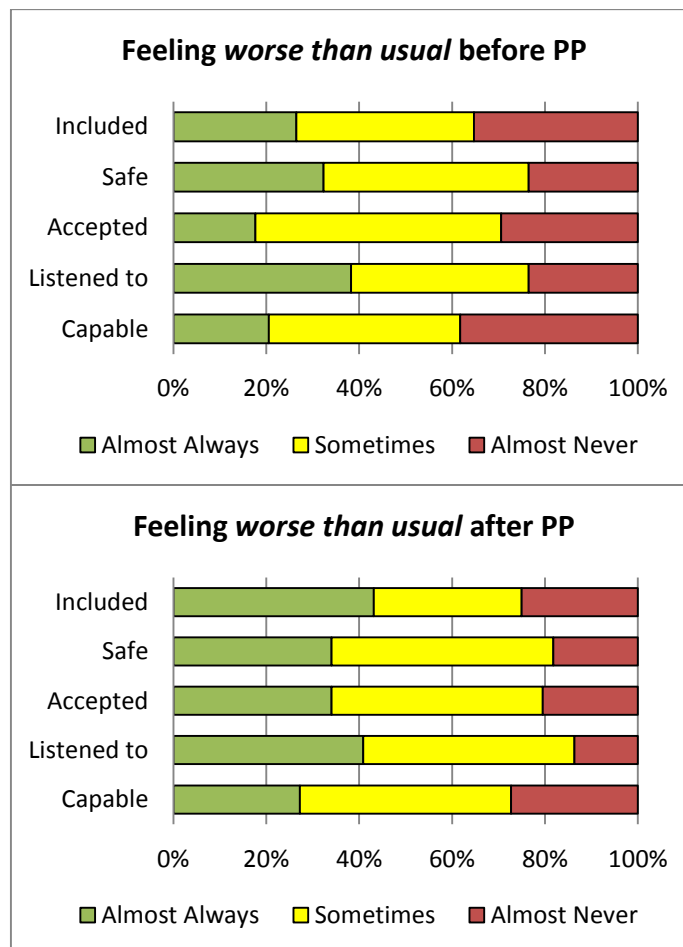
Student perceptions of formal and informal communication before PP in the two schools

As discussed in previous sections, few of the aspects of school life considered by ELS showed much change from the beginning to the end of PP in School B, while in School A perceptions of most aspects declined. This decline is clearly a concern in relation to the wellbeing of students, but because it was not found across the two schools it seems unlikely to have been caused by PP. Our other measures have not suggested such a distinct decline in attitudes at School A, either to PP or to school in general, so it seems likely that this finding might indeed result from the different ages of the year groups involved in PP at the two schools. This leaves open whether, as some teachers suggested in interview, the PP programme might be less appropriate or more difficult to implement with older students.

Different sections of the student body

It is possible to look at the ELS results for students who identified themselves, when they completed the survey as feeling *better than usual*, *worse than usual* and *the same as usual*. Similar patterns of response are seen for each section of students in both schools. In fact in School B, there were no visible difference between the responses of the different sections of students, partly because here the numbers who felt *worse than usual* were very small (16 before PP and six after PP) so it is difficult to make conclusive judgments.

In School A there were some discernible difference between the groups of students. The generally negative change over the year in perceptions about most aspects of school life was more pronounced for the students who felt *better than usual* on both occasions. That is, for these generally more cheerful School A students, the reductions in positive perceptions regarding school life were more marked. For the students who felt *worse than usual* on both occasions, there are some aspects of school life which are rated more positively after PP. This is most visible for responses to *communication* items:



School A student perceptions about communication of those feeling *worse than usual* before and after PP. This suggests that among the students who self identify as not feeling good (who may of course not be the same people over the two occasions of the survey), there has been some improvement in their perceptions of some aspects of school. Although clearly this cannot be attributed directly to PP, there is a suggestion here of some tendency for less happy students to be relating more positively to school life at the end of the year than similar students were doing at the beginning. It would be necessary to take a much more fine-grained case-study approach to discover whether this suggestive finding is linked to the hopes of the staff, and the positive experiences of the students, who were involved in PP. Since the main aim of this evaluation was to consider the issues and evidence of impact at the wider cohort-level, identifying conclusive evidence at this more individual level was outside our remit.

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The impact of Positive Psychology lessons Questionnaire

For each item, please mark the appropriate box to show how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. You should think about the activities you do in Positive Psychology sessions, and whether these have changed the way you approach your other lessons.

	Positive psychology lessons...	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree or disagree	agree	strongly agree
1	Help me to think more logically					
2	Have made me more aware of how to ask good questions					
3	Help me to keep trying					
4	Have made me better at imagining lots of possible ways to do something					
5	Help me to use language to convince others in discussions					
6	Have made me better at recognising a good piece of work					
7	Help me to work alone					
8	Have helped me to concentrate better					
9	Help me to work well in a team					
10	Help me to get better at ignoring distractions when I'm busy					
11	Have helped me to understand how I learn best					
12	Have made me more aware of other people's feelings and preferences					
13	Encourage me to feel that I am progressing in my learning					
14	Help me to see how past experiences and learning might be relevant to new situations					
15	Encourage me to feel that I can solve problems					

Overall how interesting do you find Positive Psychology sessions?

Very interesting					Not at all interesting

Overall, how enjoyable do you find Positive Psychology sessions?

Very enjoyable					Not at all enjoyable

The impact of PSHE lessons

For each item, please mark the appropriate box to show how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. You should think about the activities you do in PSHE sessions, and whether these have changed the way you approach your other lessons.

	PSHE lessons...	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree or disagree	agree	strongly agree
1	Help me to think more logically					
2	Have made me more aware of how to ask good questions					
3	Help me to keep trying					
4	Have made me better at imagining lots of possible ways to do something					
5	Help me to use language to convince others in discussions					
6	Have made me better at recognising a good piece of work					
7	Help me to work alone					
8	Have helped me to concentrate better					
9	Help me to work well in a team					
10	Help me to get better at ignoring distractions when I'm busy					
11	Have helped me to understand how I learn best					
12	Have made me more aware of other people's feelings and preferences					
13	Encourage me to feel that I am progressing in my learning					
14	Help me to see how past experiences and learning might be relevant to new situations					
15	Encourage me to feel that I can solve problems					

Overall how interesting do you find PSHE sessions?

Very interesting					Not at all interesting

Overall, how enjoyable do you find PSHE sessions?

Very enjoyable					Not at all enjoyable